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SIPDIS

ISLAMABAD FOR SA A/S ROCCA

DEPARTMENT FOR SA, SA/INS, S/CT; NSC FOR

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LONDON FOR POL/RIEDEL

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TAGS: PGOV PTER PINS MOPS CE IN LTTE

SUBJECT: Retired Indian general in Sri Lanka to discuss controversial Jaffna security zones issue

Refs: (A) FBIS Reston Va DTG 030259z May 03
- (B) Colombo 730, and previous (Notal)

(U) Classified by Lewis Amselem, Deputy Chief of Mission. Reasons 1.5 (b,d)

11. (C) SUMMARY: A retired Indian general has arrived in Sri Lanka to discuss his report on ways to resolve the controversial Jaffna security zones issue. Even as he stepped off the plane, there has been another dustup over the matter, with the Tigers criticizing a government plan to relocate military forces in Jaffna town. While there is some hope that the report can bridge differences, there is also a feeling that the Tigers do not want this issue to go away soon. END SUMMARY

12. (C) RETIRED INDIAN GENERAL ARRIVES: Retired Indian General Satish Nambiar arrived in Sri Lanka on May 6 to officially present his report on the controversial military "high security zones" located in Jaffna District. (Note: The security zones in Jaffna cover roughly 18 percent of the land area. The Tamil Tigers have argued that the zones should be sharply reduced in size and cited the matter as one of the major reasons behind their recent decision to pull out from the peace talks. End Note.) During his latest visit, Nambiar is scheduled to brief GSL officials on his report. A copy of the report is also slated to be passed to the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) for comment. Joseph Pararajasingham, a pro-LTTE MP for the Tamil National Alliance, told us that he did not believe that Nambiar would actually meet with the LTTE during this visit. He said he thought the Norwegian government facilitators would provide the document to the Tigers.

13. (C) (((Note: Per Ref B, Mission received an advance copy of the report from GSL Minister Milinda Moragoda in early April. The text of the report was passed to SA/INS via class e-mail on 04-08-03. The complex report advocates that the GSL and the LTTE agree to mutual drawdowns of their military positions. In doing this, both sides would engage in confidence-building measures facilitated by increased monitoring.)))

14. (U) (((Note: In addition to Nambiar, retired Indian Vice Admiral P.J. Jacob is also now in Sri Lanka. The objective of Jacob's visit is to advise the GSL regarding ways to monitor LTTE sea movements in order to avoid armed confrontations.)))

15. (C) ARGUMENT OVER JAFFNA TOWN PROPOSAL: Even as Nambiar stepped off the plane, there has been another dustup over the security zones issue. The latest fracas between the government and the LTTE involved a report prepared by the Defense Ministry which provided that a large chunk of Sri Lanka Army (SLA) troops based in Jaffna town would relocate to a nearby fort. The idea behind the shift would be to free up space in Jaffna town for civilian use (including in hotels where troops have been bivouacked) while lessening the footprint of the SLA in the area. (Note: Jaffna fort, where the troops would move per the GSL proposal, is located just to the west of the town in a less populated area.)

16. (C) Although the GSL seemed to be trying to go some way toward meeting their demands, the Tigers sharply criticized the government's proposal shortly after receiving it from the Norwegian facilitators last week. In a statement posted on May 1 by the pro-LTTE website "TamilNet," LTTE political chief S.P. Thamilchelvam rejected the proposed move, asserting that it was woefully inadequate and counter to the February 2002 ceasefire accord's aim of restoring "normalcy" for Jaffna civilians. Explaining his point, Thamilchelvam argued that moving the troops to Jaffna fort was not enough. Rather, all the troops should be withdrawn from Jaffna town and other urban areas as soon as possible.

Thamilchelvam demanded that the GSL revisit the issue and come back to the LTTE with another proposal.

17. (C) COMMENT: There is some hope that Nambiar's report can help bridge differences, perhaps allowing the Tigers a public way to back down and return to the negotiating table. That said, there is also a feeling that the Tigers do not want this issue to go away soon because they see it as a useful tool to deploy in hitting out at the government. Thamilchelvam's seemingly hasty and unreasonable rejection of the GSL's proposal re the Jaffna town troop relocations appears to back up this point. Via his sharp critique, Thamilchelvam also embarrassed the GSL, which had absorbed sharp criticism from peace process skeptics in the south in making the proposal to begin with. END COMMENT.

18. (U) Minimize considered.

WILLS